DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 355 UD 033 320

AUTHOR	Halpern, Ariel
TITLE	Poverty among Children Born Outside of Marriage: Preliminary Findings from the National Survey of America's Families. Discussion Papers. Assessing the New Federalism: An Urban Institute Program To Assess Changing Social Policies.
INSTITUTION	Urban Inst., Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.; Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, MI.; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, New Brunswick, NJ.; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Menlo Park, CA.; Ford Foundation, New York, NY. Education and Research Div.; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Chicago, IL.; Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, MI.; David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Los Altos, CA.; McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis, MN.; Commonwealth Fund, New York, NY.; Fund for New Jersey, East Orange.; Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Milwaukee, WI.; Joyce Foundation, Chicago, IL.; Rockefeller Foundation, New York, NY.
REPORT NO	VI-DP-99-16
PUB DATE	1999-12-00
NOTE	28p.; Project funded by the Stuart and Weingart Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	Urban Institute, 2100 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037. For full text: http://www.urban.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Births to Single Women; Children; Educational Attainment; Employment Level; *Fatherless Family; *Low Income Groups; Mothers; *Poverty

ABSTRACT

This study examines whether children born outside of marriage and currently living in single-mother families are more likely to be poor than children in single-mother families who were born tc married parents. Using the 1997 National Survey of America's Families, the study finds that among children living with single mothers, those born outside of marriage are 1.7 times more likely to be poor than those born to married parents. While this difference is statistically significant and non-negligible, differences in mother's education and work status and whether she lives with other adult relatives are all stronger predictors of child poverty. Nevertheless, given that children born outside of marriage are persistently more likely to be poor than other children living in single-mother families, even when a mother's characteristics are taken into account, a continued policy focus on children born to unmarried mothers is warranted. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 438 355

Poverty among Children Born Outside of Marriage: Preliminary Findings from the National Survey of America's Families

Ariel Halpern

99-16

Discussion Papers

December 1999

Assessing the New Federalism
An Urban Institute Program to Assess Changing Social Policies

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Brown
The Urban Institute

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD 033320

Assessing the New Federalism

Assessing the New Federalism is a multiyear Urban Institute project designed to analyze the devolution of responsibility for social programs from the federal government to the states. It focuses primarily on health care, income security, employment and training programs, and social services. Researchers monitor program changes and fiscal developments. Alan Weil is the project director. In collaboration with Child Trends, the project studies changes in family well-being. The project provides timely, nonpartisan information to inform public debate and to help state and local decisionmakers carry out their new responsibilities more effectively.

Key components of the project include a household survey, studies of policies in 13 states, and a database with information on all states and the District of Columbia. Publications and database are available free of charge on the Urban Institute's Web site: http://www.urban.org. This paper is one in a series of discussion papers analyzing information from these and other sources.

The project has received funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Commonwealth Fund, the Stuart Foundation, the Weingart Foundation, The Fund for New Jersey, The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

The nonpartisan Urban Institute publishes studies, reports, and books on timely topics worthy of public consideration. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, its funders, or other authors in the series.

Publisher: The Urban Institute, 2100 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037
Copyright © 1999.
Permission is granted for reproduction of this document, with attribution to the Urban Institute.

The author would like to thank Elaine Sorensen for her assistance and Christine Bachrach and Sheila Zedlewski for their comments on an earlier draft. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 1999 Population Association of America annual meeting.

Abstract

This study examines whether children born outside of marriage and currently living in single-mother families are more likely to be poor than children in single-mother families who were born to married parents. Using the 1997 National Survey of America's Families, I find that, among children living with single mothers, those born outside of marriage are 1.7 times more likely to be poor than are those born to married parents. While this difference is statistically significant and non-negligible, differences in a mother's education, work status, and whether she lives with other adult relatives are all stronger predictors of child poverty. Nevertheless, given that children born outside of marriage are persistently more likely to be poor than other children living in single-mother families even when a mother's characteristics are taken into account, a continued policy focus on children born to unmarried mothers is warranted.

Contents

Introduction....1

Background....1

Data and Methods....3

A Preliminary Examination....5

Logit Results and Discussion....10

Conclusion....16

Notes....18

Appendix Table....19

References....21

About the Author....23

Poverty among Children Born Outside of Marriage: Preliminary Findings from the National Survey of America's Families

Introduction

An extensive literature examining the well-being of children growing up with a single mother concludes that these children fare worse than children from two-parent families (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). This body of research has been used as evidence that children born outside of marriage are at a great disadvantage compared to children born to married parents. However, half of the children currently living in single-mother families were born into two-parent families that became one-parent families due to death, desertion, or divorce.[1] The question of whether children living in single-mother families who were born outside of marriage are at an even greater disadvantage than their peers who live with a single mother but were born into a two-parent family has not been the focus of much research. This paper examines whether nonmarital children, that is, children born to unmarried parents and who live with a single mother, are at greater risk of living in poverty than children who live with a single mother but were born within marriage. It also profiles the population of children living with a single mother by the mother's marital status at birth, using the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a newly released data source.

Background

In this analysis, I attempt to determine whether the children of single mothers who were born outside of marriage are at greater risk of living in poverty than the children of single mothers who were born to married parents. While there is extensive research on nonmarital childbearing and on the effects of single parenthood on child outcomes, little has been done to assess whether nonmarital children are at high risk solely because they live with a single parent

or whether their nonmarital status confers an addi'ional burden. Though many authors have noted the importance of addressing this question, few have done so (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Many researchers have found that, compared to children living in two-parent families, the children of single mothers are at greater risk of negative outcomes, such as teenage childbearing and lowered educational achievement; similarly, poor children are at a greater risk of negative outcomes than are nonpoor children (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Peters and Mullis 1997; Smith et al. 1997). Importantly, a mother's marital and financial status are highly correlated. Single-parent families are much more likely to be poor than families containing two parents. Poverty can also influence initial marriage formations and later marital stability, two routes to single parenthood. Research on the relative importance of these two elements is somewhat equivocal. Several studies demonstrate that, controlling for income, children in single-parent families do worse than those in original two-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Pong 1997; Thomson et al. 1994). Others find no effect or find that income trumps family structure (Miller and Davis 1997; Peters and Mullis 1997; Smith et al. 1997).

Comparisons between the outcomes of children born to unmarried mothers and those born to married parents are less numerous. In their study on single parenthood, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) find few distinctions between the children of unmarried mothers and those of divorced mothers with respect to their propensity to drop out of high school and their likelihood of becoming a teen parent. Similarly, other research on family structure unearths few differences between the two types of children (Lipman and Offord 1997; Smith et al. 1997). The findings in these studies that are related to nonmarital versus marital children, however, were not presented in the text of the articles but rather are secondary inferences obtained from the data presented.

Data and Methods

The 1997 NSAF provides a nationally representative sample of children, nonelderly adults, and their families (Dean Brick et al. 1999). The survey contains information about many facets of child and family well-being, including economic security, education and training, health care, use of social services, household composition, and family structure. This survey was designed to obtain detailed information about numerous aspects of child well-being to aid in evaluating the impact of the devolution of responsibility for social welfare from the federal government to the states.

Data were collected on approximately 34,400 focal children, including an oversample of children living in families below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. No more than two children per household were selected to be the focus of an extended interview, with selection based on the age of the children. One child under the age of 6 and one child between the ages of 6 and 17 could be chosen from each family. Detailed information about the sampled children, including questions about health, education, behavior, and child care, was obtained. Numerous questions were also asked about the children's parents and families[2].

For this study, children were classified as nonmarital if the child's biological parents have never been married or if the child's biological parents reported that they were unmarried when the child was born. Single mothers are defined as the biological or adoptive mother of a focal child who is not currently married and living with her spouse; she may be divorced, separated, widowed, or never married. Families, and family income, are defined according to the U.S. Census Bureau's description of the "legal family"—two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, not including unrelated subfamilies or individuals (U.S. Census Bureau 1994).

Initially, I examine how the characteristics of the children of single mothers born inside and outside of marriage vary. Then, I estimate a multivariate model to account for the interrelationships between a mother's marital status at birth and additional factors on the probability of being in poverty for the children of single mothers. The outcome variable equals one if a child's family income is below 100 percent of the poverty threshold in 1996 and zero otherwise; the model estimated is a logit. While the initial tabulations show that there are large differences in poverty by a child's marital/nonmarital birth status, they cannot tell us whether these distinctions are due primarily to nonmarital birth status itself or whether a mother's marital status at birth only serves as an indicator for a variety of other factors correlated with poverty.

Because the likelihood of being poor varies among children of different ages, I estimated four models: one including all children and three divided into child age groups: 0 to 5, 6 to 11, and 12 to 17. Each model includes measures of a mother's education, age at child's birth, marital status at first birth, work status, and child support receipt; the model also includes the presence of other adult relatives and a child's race and ethnicity.

In creating the model, I referenced the wide variety of research that examines the causes and consequences of poverty. Using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Duncan (1984) found work status to be a central element in determining family poverty—families with workers were much less likely to be living in poverty. He also addressed the effects of race, finding that black families are more likely to experience spells of poverty than are white families. Hernandez (1993) broadened the discussion of race and poverty to include Hispanics as well as blacks and found both groups to have elevated poverty rates compared with whites. In addition, he examined the influence that nonparent family members can have on the family poverty rate and found that other relatives' income has a modest effect on the relative poverty rate for families with children. Mayer (1997) controlled for several parental characteristics in her creation of a

"conventional model" of the effect of income on child outcomes, including a mother's age at birth, race, and educational attainment. She found a mother's highest education level to be positively correlated with child outcomes, and race and age at child's birth to be negatively correlated.

Additionally, while not always included in analyses of poverty, child support receipt can have a significant effect on the well-being of children living with single mothers. Though less than half of all eligible children receive child support, the income obtained by those who do receive support can be an important addition to their family's resources. Indeed, the Family Support Act of 1988, a child support reform measure, was designed largely under the assumption that increased child support receipt would decrease poverty among children who have a parent living elsewhere (McLanahan et al. 1994). Additional child support reforms, such as those included in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, have also cited this aim. As well, a recent study by Meyer and Hu (1999) found that child support income raised the family income of six to seven percent of single-mother families over the poverty threshold in 1995.

A Preliminary Examination

Of the 15 million children currently living in a single-mother family, half were born to unmarried parents. Importantly, this population of nonmarital children includes not only recent births but also older children. In fact, table 1 shows that only 46 percent of nonmarital children living with single mothers are under the age of 6, and almost a quarter are 12 years old or older (for additional information, see appendix table).

Table 1: Characteristics of the Children of Single Mothers			
	All Children of Single Mothers	Children Born outside of Marriage	Children Born to Married Parents
Weighted Number (in millions)	15.2	7.59	7.57
Age Distribution of Children (%)			
0–5	32	46[a]	18
6–11	33	30[a]	35
12–17	35	24[a]	46
Poor (%)	48	60[a]	37
Poor by Age of Child (%)			
0–5	56	58	51
6–11	46	60[a]	35
12–17	43	63[a]	33
Black (%)	34	47[a]	21
Poor by Race (%)			
Black	56	63[a]	39
Nonblack	44	57[a]	36
Hispanic (%)	19	21[b]	17
Poor by Ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	60	68[a]	50
Non-Hispanic	45	57[a]	34
Born When Mother Was Less Than 20 Years Old (%)	18	28[a]	8
Poor by Teen Motherhood (%)			
Born to Teen Mother	61	64[c]	51
Born to Older Mother	46	58[a]	36
Household Includes Adult Relatives (%)	19	26[a]	12
Child under Age Six or Has Siblings under Age Six (%)	47	63[a]	31
Mother's Highest Level of Education (%)			
Percent High School Dropouts	21	27[a]	15
Percent High School Graduates	43	45[b]	40
Percent Attended Some College	25	21[a]	29
Percent College Graduates	11	7[a]	16

Table 1: Characteristics of the Children of Single Mothers			
	All Children of Single Mothers	Children Born outside of Marriage	Children Born to Married Parents
Mother's Work Status (%)			
Mother Works Full-Time, Full Year	35	26[a]	44
Mother Works Full-Time, Part Year	20	21	19
Mother Works Part-Time, Full Year	7	7	7
Mother Works Part-Time, Part Year	11	13[b]	10
Mother Does Not Work	26	33[a]	20
Receives Child Support (%)	38	30[a]	47
Average Amount of Child Support Received (for those who receive) ($)	3,656	2,087[a]	4,598
Unweighted Sample Size (#)	9,053	4,684	4,369

Notes:
a. $p < .01$
b. $p < .05$
c. $p < .10$
Notation reflects a statistically significant difference between children born outside of marriage and children born to married parents (for additional detail, see appendix table).

Comparisons between nonmarital children living with single mothers and children living with single mothers but born to married parents reveal noticeable differences between the populations. Particularly striking is the difference in the poverty rate for the two groups. Among children living in single-mother families, 60 percent of children born out of wedlock are poor, compared with only 37 percent of children born within marriage. Examining poverty rates by the age of the child, however, reveals some similarities in the propensity to be poor. Among children under the age of six living with a single mother, those born outside of marriage are only somewhat less likely to be poor than are those born to married parents (58 percent, compared with 51 percent)—a difference that is not statistically significant. That is, young children living with single mothers have an almost equal likelihood of living in poverty whether they were born

inside or outside of marriage. Among older children living with single mothers, however, a large divergence in poverty rates appears. For example, among children ages 12 to 17, 63 percent of those born outside of marriage are poor, compared with only 33 percent of those born to married parents—a statistically significant difference.

Interestingly, a comparison of poverty trends by age of child and nonmarital birth status reveals only negligible differences by age among children born outside of marriage, but rather large differences by age among children born to married parents. In fact, there are no statistically significant differences in the poverty rate by age of child for children born outside of marriage. Marital children under the age of six, on the other hand, are more likely to be poor than are their counterparts who are six and older, a difference that is statistically significant. Older children born within marriage have no statistically significant difference in their poverty rates[3].

Among the children of single mothers, nonmarital children are more than twice as likely to be black than are children born within marriage; they are only slightly more likely to be Hispanic. Particularly interesting, however, is that although there is a substantial difference in the poverty rate among blacks and nonblacks in the sample (56 percent, compared with 44 percent), after controlling for the mother's marital status at birth, the difference in poverty by race practically disappears. Black children born outside of marriage have a poverty rate that more closely parallels that of nonblack children born outside of marriage than it does that of black children born within marriage, suggesting that marital status, not race, drives poverty rates. This phenomenon is not as clear for children of Hispanic origin—Hispanics born both inside and outside of marriage have a high rate of poverty.

Nonmarital children are much more likely to have been born while their mother was younger than 20 years old than are children born to married parents. While only 8 percent of marital children were born to a teen mother, 28 percent of nonmarital children were born while

their mother was under the age of 20. Children born outside of marriage are also more likely to live in households containing at least one adult relative (usually a grandparent), 26 percent, compared with 12 percent. Nonmarital children are approximately twice as likely to live in households containing young children; 63 percent of nonmarital children live in families in which at least one child (either themselves or a sibling) is under the age of six, compared with 31 percent of children born to married parents. This likely reflects the differing age distribution among the two groups of children. Among children of single mothers, those born to married parents are much less likely to be under the age of six than are those born outside of marriage (18 percent, compared with 46 percent).

Children born outside of marriage are more likely to have a mother who did not graduate from high school than are children born to married parents. They are also less likely to live with a mother who works full-time year-round. While 44 percent of children born to married parents have a mother who is fully employed, this is true for only 26 percent of children born outside of marriage. Similarly, a third of the mothers of nonmarital children do not work at all, compared with only a fifth of children born to married parents.

Finally, children born to married parents are much more likely to receive financial contributions from their absent fathers than are children born outside of marriage. Among children living with a single mother, 47 percent of children born within marriage receive some child support income, compared with only 30 percent of those born to unmarried mothers. Among those receiving child support, children born within marriage also tend to receive a greater amount of child support income than children born outside of marriage. In 1996, marital children who received child support received, on average, more than twice as much as nonmarital children who received child support.

Logit Results and Discussion

Next, a set of logits were estimated to address the interrelationships between being born outside of marriage and other factors with respect to the propensity to be poor. The regression results in table 2 show that, even when other differences are taken into account, nonmarital children of single mothers are 1.7 times more likely to be poor than children of single mothers who were born within marriage[4]. Notably, the effects differ by age. For children under the age of six, being born out of wedlock had no effect on the likelihood of living in poverty, a finding consistent with the tabular analysis. For older children, however, a nonmarital birth did signify a higher propensity for being poor. Among children ages 6 to 11, those born outside of marriage are 2.6 times more likely to be poor than those born to married parents. For children ages 12 to 17, the differential is 2.0 times.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Poverty Status among Children in Single-Mother Families, by Age of Child

	All Children	Ages 0–5	Ages 6–11	Ages 12–17
Nonmarital Birth	1.73[a] (.020)	1.11 (.214)	2.59[a] (.214)	1.97[a] (.242)
Mother's Highest Level of Education				
Mother Is a High School Dropout	9.03[a] (.036)	7.85[a] (.446)	7.24[a] (.361)	13.6[a] (.338)
Mother Is a High School Graduate	3.49[a] (.027)	3.78[a] (.322)	3.78[a] (.280)	2.83[a] (.297)
Mother Completed Some College	2.20[a] (.031)	1.75 (.381)	2.12[a] (.264)	2.72[a] (.333)
Family Characteristics				
Child Lives with at Least One Adult Relative	.20[a] (.029)	.15[a] (.307)	.24[a] (.279)	.34[a] (.359)
Child Born When Mother Was Younger Than 20 Years Old	1.01 (.025)	.72 (.298)	1.17 (.238)	1.46 (.249)

Table 2: Factors Influencing Poverty Status among Children in Single-Mother Families, by Age of Child				
	All Children	Ages 0–5	Ages 6–11	Ages 12–17
Child or Sibling of Child Is under Age Six	1.77[a] (.018)	---	2.64[a] (.202)	2.56[a] (.231)
Do Not Receive Child Support	1.73[a] (.022)	1.55[c] (.230)	1.77[a] (.195)	1.92[a] (.201)
Mother's Work Status				
Mother Works Full-Time, Part Year	4.06[a] (.029)	4.76[a] (.310)	4.26[a] (.287)	3.42[a] (.249)
Mother Works Part-Time, Full Year	5.00[a] (.044)	3.90[a] (.424)	7.39[a] (.371)	4.76[a] (.379)
Mother Works Part-Time, Part Year	13.3[a] (.034)	8.76[a] (.416)	19.9[a] (.352)	19.9[a] (.420)
Mother Does Not Work	23.8[a] (.029)	27.4[a] (.411)	28.8[a] (.311)	19.9[a] (.321)
Race/Ethnicity of Child				
Black	1.22 (.025)	1.22 (.230)	1.17 (.243)	1.17 (.293)
Hispanic	1.39[c] (.028)	1.57 (.291)	1.62[c] (.244)	1.05 (.235)
Geographic Controls				
Live in the West	.98 (.033)	.99 (.348)	.79 (.297)	1.06 (.280)
Live in the Midwest	.88 (.032)	.86 (.307)	.78 (.256)	.98 (.327)
Live in the South	1.19 (.024)	1.23 (.232)	1.15 (.171)	1.23 (.260)
Intercept	.03[a] (.032)	.08[a] (.467)	.02[a] (.317)	.02[a] (.381)

Notes:
a. $p < .01$
b. $p < .05$
c. $p < .10$
Coefficients have been transformed into odds ratios; standard errors reflect the untransformed coefficients.

That there is no difference in the propensity to be poor between marital and nonmarital children under the age of six is of particular interest. The lack of a nonmarital effect on poverty among young children likely reflects the high poverty rate of young children born within marriage. Whereas the poverty rate among nonmarital children is relatively unaffected by the age of the child, young children living with single mothers and born within marriage are much more likely to be poor than are their older counterparts. However, any arguments to explain this phenomenon are merely speculative. Since the data contain only a single cross section of children, I cannot say whether it is simply that young children of single mothers born within marriage have a high poverty rate at this stage in life (but will come to look more like the groups of older, marital children as they age) or whether they will continue to have a poverty rate which mirrors that of children born outside of marriage.

It is possible that this finding reflects the fact that young children born within marriage have only recently entered into single-mother families and thus are encountering a temporary negative income shock. Immediately after divorce or separation, children tend to experience a severe drop in family income; for white adolescent children, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) estimate this decline to average almost $26,000. While the single-mother families of children whose parents divorced or separated many years ago may have had an opportunity to improve their income level, most likely through increased labor force participation, those who only recently experienced a marital disruption may not have had time to recoup their losses.

It is also possible that unmeasured characteristics of the single mothers of young children who were born within marriage distinguish them from the single mothers of their older complements. For example, since the mothers of the young children born within marriage must have divorced, separated, or been widowed before the time of the survey to be included in the sample, the probability that their marriage was of very short tenure is high. That is, their children

experience significantly different circumstances (similar to children born outside of marriage) than do children born to married parents who divorce at an older age. Without longitudinal data, however, it is impossible to know at what age the older children in our sample who were born within marriage experienced a marital disruption. Thus, a test of this theory cannot be obtained from the information at hand.

Beyond a mother's marital status at birth, other factors combine to influence the likelihood that a child lives in poverty. Many of these factors are stronger predictors of poverty than a mother's marital status at birth. A mother's education has a large effect on the poverty rate for children of all ages, as does her work status. Not surprisingly, the children of high school dropouts have a much greater probability of living in poverty than do those of college graduates. Similarly, children with mothers who do not work full-time year-round are substantially more likely to be poor than children whose mothers have a greater attachment to the labor force. Particularly hard hit is the 26 percent of children whose mothers do not work—they are 24 times more likely to be poor than children whose mothers work full-time year-round. Even the children of mothers who have steady part-time employment are at a significant disadvantage. This strong and substantial effect of work on poverty, coupled with the fact that only a quarter of children born outside of marriage have a mother with a full-time year-round job, suggest that the goal of increased steady employment among the mothers of nonmarital children could have a much more significant effect on reducing child poverty than merely decreasing nonmarital births alone.

Family and household composition also has large effects on child poverty rates. Children of single mothers who live in households containing at least one adult relative in addition to the child's mother, most often a grandparent, are much less likely to be poor than children who do not live with adult relatives. This effect is particularly pronounced for younger children—children under the age of six who live with at least one adult (nonparent) relative are less than

one-sixth as likely to be poor as are those who do not live with adult relatives. These relatives may serve many beneficial functions that have a positive impact on income levels, including providing child care and contributing earnings to the maintenance of the family.

The presence of young children in a single-mother family drives the poverty rate upward. All else being equal, families with any children under the age of six are 1.8 times more likely to be poor than families containing only older children. This finding is also borne out in the subgroup analyses of older children. Children between the ages of 6 and 11 who have siblings under the age of 6 are more likely to be poor than those who do not have young siblings; this is also true for children between 12 and 17. This explanation is reasonable considering that children who are not yet of school age likely require greater parental supervision, which may affect a single mother's ability to work to support her family.

An unexpected finding is the absence of a relationship between having given birth while under the age of 20 (teen motherhood) and the poverty rate in the overall sample or in any of the three subgroups, especially given the popular perception of teen births as one of the central predictors of disadvantage. That being black is not significantly associated with child poverty in the model is also surprising, given these same grounds. As discussed in the previous section, however, even a preliminary examination of race by a mother's marital status at birth suggests that while black children are more likely to be poor than are white children, almost all of this difference is due to variations in personal characteristics by race, instead of race alone. Similar interpretation can be made for the lack of a teen-mother effect on child poverty.

The nonreceipt of child support income was associated with an increased risk of poverty in the overall sample, as well as in the three subgroups of children. To test whether the lower child support receipt rate among nonmarital children is an important factor in accounting for the differences in poverty rates between them and other children living with single mothers, the

model is run both with and without the child support receipt variable (table 3). Including child support in the model does not have much effect on the magnitude of the nonmarital coefficient. This suggests that the nonmarital variable is not merely a proxy for nonreceipt of child support by nonmarital children.

Table 3: Odds Ratios for the Nonmarital Variable in Three Models Including Various Measures of Child Support Receipt

	No Child Support Measure	Child Support Dummy Variable	Continuous Measure of Child Support
Nonmarital Birth	1.8	1.7	1.6

Though the child support income variable included in the primary model is a dummy variable set equal to one if the child's family does not receive child support, the model is also estimated using a continuous measure of the amount of child support received. Since the fathers of nonmarital children have, on average, lower incomes than do the nonresident fathers of children born within marriage, it is plausible that they not only are less likely to pay child support but also contribute less in the cases in which they do pay. The gap in the mean amount of child support received by the two groups of children is substantial. Whereas nonmarital children who receive child support collect only $2,087 annually on average from their absent father, children born to married parents receive an average of $4,598. If this gap has an effect on child poverty for the two groups of children, some of this variation can be expected to be accounted for in the coefficient on the nonmarital dummy in the model in which the amount of child support received is not specified. That is, the coefficient on the nonmarital dummy would decrease from the level estimated in the primary model (which contains only the dummy variable) after adding the continuous measure of child support. However, using the continuous

measure of child support results in only a slight decrease in the magnitude of the nonmarital effect, from 1.7 to 1.6. Thus, the continued existence of the nonmarital effect cannot be ascribed to the differential in child support receipt amounts between the two groups.

Conclusion

While much research documents that children in two-parent families are less likely to be poor than children living with a single mother, little previous work has examined whether children in single-mother families born outside of marriage are more likely to be poor than children currently living with a single mother but born within marriage. The children of single mothers who were not married at the time of their child's birth are 1.7 times more likely to be poor than are the children of those who were married. While this effect persists even when controlling for other observable differences between the two groups, other factors such as living with other nonparent relatives and the mother's education and employment status have larger impacts on child poverty. Two particularly important findings for policy purposes are that among young children, those born to married parents are just as likely to live in poverty as their nonmarital counterparts and that being born outside of marriage has a negative impact for older children. To more fully assess such implications, however, would require the estimation of a causal model using longitudinal data. To this end, the research presented here serves as a baseline for future analyses.

Based on the high poverty rate among all young children living with a single mother, broadening policies beyond a focus on nonmarital childbearing to the maintenance of potentially fragile new marriages seems warranted. That is, if being born within marriage alone is not a protective factor, a simple reduction in nonmarital childbearing without a longer-term emphasis on family maintenance may not lead to significant gains in child well-being. Additionally, the

long-term negative effect of being born outside of marriage reemphasizes the need for effective action within this policy arena.

Notes

1. Author's tabulation.

2. In most cases, detailed information was collected from and about the parents of the child. In less than 3 percent of the cases in which a parent of the focal child was living in the household at the time of the survey, information was instead collected from and about a nonparent family member—usually a grandparent. (This person reported themselves to be the most knowledgeable adult in the household with respect to the sampled child.) In the instances in which the parent was not asked for more detailed information, only limited information about the parent was collected. These children were excluded from this analysis because of this lack of detail. Since they comprise such a small fraction of the sample, however, their exclusion should not significantly bias my results.

3. To determine whether these findings were dependent on the age categories chosen, I also examined the poverty rates by child's age and mother's marital status at birth for numerous other age groupings. These investigations revealed only negligible differences compared with the age break scheme used in this analysis.

4. Because of the complex design of the NSAF, statistical interpretation of the results required the creation of a weighting scheme that takes into account the unequal probabilities of household selection related to the clustered sample design, and the nonresponse rate, as well as aligning to known population estimates by age, race, gender, and geographic area. The jackknife method of replication was used to account for these factors.

Appendix Table: Characteristics of Children of Single Mothers, by Age of Child and Mother's Marital Status at Birth (NM = Nonmarital, M = Marital)						
	Ages 0–5		Ages 6–11		Ages 12–17	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Weighted Number (in millions)	3.5	1.4	2.3	2.7	3.5	1.8
Poor (%)	58	51	60	35	63	33
Mother's Highest Level of Education (%)						
High School Dropouts	26	15	22	14	33	15
High School Graduates	45	45	45	36	48	42
Attended Some College	21	24	24	33	16	27
College Graduates	8	16	9	17	3	16
Family Characteristics (%)						
Born When Mother Was Younger Than 20 Years Old	30	6	21	6	36	10
Living in Households Including Adult Relatives	33	24	19	11	22	8
Children under Age Six or Having Siblings under Age Six	---	---	43	26	18	8
Mother's Work Status (%)						
Mother Works Full-Time, Full Year	21	30	32	45	29	48
Mother Works Full-Time, Part Year	26	22	18	18	16	20
Mother Works Part-Time, Full Year	6	8	8	7	7	7
Mother Works Part-Time, Part Year	15	11	12	12	11	7
Mother Does Not Work	32	28	29	18	38	18
Receives Child Support (%)	28	43	35	50	26	46
Average Amount of Child Support Received (for those who receive) ($)	1,806	4,183	2,374	4,755	2,191	4,619
Race/Ethnicity of Child (%)						
Black	43	16	47	21	56	21
Hispanic	23	19	23	16	16	17
Poor by Race (%)						
Black	62	51	58	39	71	34
Nonblack	55	51	63	33	53	32
Poor by Ethnicity (%)						
Hispanic	65	70	73	44	69	46
Non-Hispanic	56	47	57	33	62	30

Appendix Table: Characteristics of Children of Single Mothers, by Age of Child and Mother's Marital Status at Birth (NM = Nonmarital, M = Marital)						
	Ages 0–5		Ages 6–11		Ages 12–17	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Poor by Teen Motherhood (%)						
Born to Teen Mother	57	52	73	68	68	44
Born to Older Mother	58	51	57	33	61	32
Unweighted Sample Size (#)	2,188	923	1,545	1,506	969	1,922

References

Dean Brick, P., G. Kenney, R. McCullough-Harlin, S. Rajan, F. Scheuren, K. Wang, J.M. Brick, and P. Cunningham. 1999. *1999 NSAF: Survey Methods and Data Reliability*. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute. July. *Assessing the New Federalism Methodology Report No. 1*.

Duncan, G.J. 1984. *Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Duncan, G.J., and J. Brooks-Gunn. 1997. "Income Effects across the Lifespan: Integration and Interpretation." In *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, edited by G.J. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Garfinkel, I., and S. McLanahan. 1986. *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma*. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

Hernandez. D. 1993. *America's Children*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lipman, E.L., and D.R. Offord. 1997. "Psychosocial Morbidity among Poor Children in Ontario." In *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, edited by G.J Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Mayer, S. 1997. *What Money Can't Buy: Family Income and Children's Life Chances*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

McLanahan, S., and G. Sandefur. 1994. *Growing Up with a Single Parent*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

McLanahan, S., J. Seltzer, T. Hanson, and E. Thompson. 1994. "Child Support Enforcement and Child Well-Being: Greater Security or Greater Conflict?" In *Child Support and Child Well-Being*, edited by I. Garfinkel, S. McLanahan, and P. Robins. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

Meyer, D., and M. Hu. 1999. "A Note on the Antipoverty Effectiveness of Child Support among Mother-Only Families." *Journal of Human Resources* 34 (Winter).

Miller, J.E., and D. Davis. 1997. "Poverty History, Marital History, and Quality of Children's Home Environments." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (November).

Peters, E.H., and N.C. Mullis. 1997. "The Role of Family Income and Sources of Income in Adolescent Achievement." In *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, edited by G.J. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Pong, S. 1997. "Family Structure, School Context, and Eighth-Grade Math and Reading Achievement." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (August).

Smith, J.R., J. Brooks-Gunn, and P.K. Klebanov. 1997. "Consequences of Living in Poverty For Young Children's Cognitive and Verbal Ability and Early School Achievement." In *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, edited by G.J. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Thomson, E., T. Hanson, and S. McLanahan. 1994. "Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Economic Resources vs. Parental Behaviors." *Social Forces* 73 (September).

U.S. Census Bureau. 1994. "Employment and Earnings Characteristics of Families: Fourth Quarter 1993." *Current Population Survey Publications*. http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/pub/famee_1293.htm. February.

About the Author

Ariel Halpern is a researcher with the Urban Institute's Income and Benefits Policy Center. Her research focuses on child support policy, nonresident fatherhood, and out-of-wedlock childbearing.